

extracted from registers, estimates made
even of his
stature calculated in relation to a giantess he
once went
to see/ This is certainly one of the worst
abuses of mod-
ern criticism. The earth, indeed, seems filled
with people
who only read books in order to write books,
as it is with
others who only enter into conversation in
order to talk
themselves. Vain curiosity, the primal
curse in Eden,
becomes a cardinal virtue in the world of
learning. How-
ever, that is at least nothing new; little has
changed since
Montaigne wrote, three and a half centuries
ago: 'This
man, whom about midnight, when others
take their rest,
thou seest come out of his study, meagre-
looking, with
eyes trilling, flegmatick, squalide, and
spauling, doest
thou thinke that plodding on his books he
doth seek how
he shall become an honester man, or more
wise, or more
content? There is no such matter. He will
either die in
his pursuit, or teach posterity the measure
of Plautus's
verses and the true orthography of a
Latine word/
Fifteen centuries earlier still Seneca had
already ridiculed
the follies of the Homeric Question 'and
other matters j
of the same stamp, which if you keep them to
yourself,
will not profit your inner life, and if you talk
about them,
will make you seem not a sage, but a bore'.
But human
futility knows no limits. It learns everything
and for-
gets nothing, except common sense. There
was once a

worthy Jesuit who bestowed infinite labour
on making
an alphabetical index of all the names of
animals applied
by the fathers to heretics. After all, it may
have kept
him out of worse mischief. Pere Hardouin,
again, per-
suaded himself with more than German
thoroughness
that the Classics were all forged except
Homer, Herod-
otus, Plautus, Pliny, and fragments of Cicero
(the *Aeneid*
and the *Odes* he also admitted; but they were
not by Virgil
or Horace). However, as he persuaded no one
else, here,